

In addition to the bill, myself and a group of Senators—and House Members as well—have also sent letters to EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, calling on the agency and the Department of Energy to complete the fuel harmonization study which Congress requested more than 5 years ago. That report was due in 2008. This report would examine the effects of the Nation's varying boutique fuels on retail prices and also assess the feasibility of developing national or regional standards to reduce the multiple varieties required today by the EPA.

Having fewer types of fuel would make more fuel available during shortages, thereby putting downward pressure on prices at the pump. It would give refineries more options to meet demand and help stabilize and reduce the retail price of gasoline.

We expect EPA and the Department of Energy to follow through on the congressional intent that was outlined in the 2005 law and conduct and complete that study as soon as possible, which correlates closely with the legislation we are sponsoring.

Bear in mind, the measures I just discussed do not cost anything. They take no funding to work. Yet they can help us reduce fuel prices for the American consumer, for our American families. They can make doing business in America more affordable, reduce our trade deficit, and help get Americans back to work again.

We need to increase domestic fuel production, and we need to provide regulatory relief in order to do it because high energy prices, whether it is fuel for our cars or electricity for our homes and businesses, impact virtually every sector of American life. That includes jobs, that includes economic growth, that includes the purchasing power of the American family, and ultimately includes our standard of living and our quality of life.

Our future is fueled by energy and that future depends on the decisions and the choices we make right now. We need to get them right.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. KLOBUCHAR). The Senator from Missouri.

THANKING THE MISSOURI NATIONAL GUARD

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Madam President, I rise to make some brief comments about people at home I am so proud of. Over the past 3 weeks, my home State has been the site of heartbreaking destruction that resulted from a series of severe weather incidents throughout the State. We have also had the privilege of witnessing great acts of bravery, compassion, and neighbors being neighbors in response to these incidents. I wish to take just a moment to recognize the incredible character of Missourians and particularly to recognize the contributions made by the citizen-soldiers and airmen of the Missouri National Guard.

Today, weeks after historic flooding began, we continue to see its life-altering effects, in my State and others all along the Mississippi River. My prayers, and those of my colleagues, go out to all those who have and will continue to have their lives altered by this tragedy.

I will continue to work with my colleagues in the Missouri delegation to make sure that the Federal Government provides the assistance necessary to help Missourians affected by tragedy to get back on their feet. Already, the President has granted the first Federal disaster assistance to individuals and households across the State. More announcements will come as damage assessments are completed. USDA is also poised to assist and will start holding public meetings in the affected areas to inform farmers and landowners of the help that they can receive.

One thing that has struck me about the response to the storms has been the dignity and class with which Missourians have carried themselves. In my State, families have been driven from their homes, pushed away from their jobs, lost everything. Whether it is a family in North St. Louis whose home was destroyed by a tornado, or a producer whose family farm was submerged when the levee protecting it was intentionally breached, Missourians have drawn on their faith, their families, and their neighbors to pull through. I had the opportunity to spend time with some of these families during my trip to view flooding in southeast Missouri. Their courage is inspiring, and is an example of the American spirit that we all hold dear.

We have had a rough year. The last 3 weeks have been particularly destructive, starting with the tornado and strong winds that ripped through the St. Louis area on Good Friday, April 22. This tornado, rated an EF-4, was estimated to be the strongest to hit the area in nearly four decades.

As the tornado and storms battered the St. Louis area, rain continued to fall on southeast and southern Missouri. When Governor Jay Nixon made the decision to deploy the Missouri National Guard to assist local emergency responders in their efforts, it marked the 20th time in the past 6 years that the Missouri National Guard has provided such assistance, including the last time that catastrophic flooding struck the State, in 2008.

Since their deployment to respond to this latest disaster, the Missouri National Guard, under the strong leadership of their adjutant general MG Stephen Danner, has provided invaluable support to the Governor, the Army Corps of Engineers, local responders and citizens across the scores of communities that have suffered damage. Two events from recent days provide a perfect summary of the service that these brave men and women continue to perform for the people of my State.

Last week, the citizen-soldiers and airmen of the Missouri National Guard

joined the people of Caruthersville, in Pemiscot County, to rapidly erect a secondary flood wall to support the existing wall. This wall, made of 60,000 sandbags stretched across over 3,000 feet, helped to provide safety and peace of mind for a community that feared the worst.

A couple of counties away, Missouri National Guard members helped to save a 93-year-old trapped in her car as she tried to cross a flooded Black River. One of the guardsmen on the scene, seeing his first emergency duty, remarked "we weren't there to be heroes, we were just doing our jobs."

The citizen-soldiers and airmen of the Missouri National Guard, while "just doing their jobs," have played an important role in supporting the flood response efforts of their neighbors.

A member of the 1138th Military Police Company said it best when he said "nothing makes you feel as good as being able to help your neighbors in Missouri." The Missouri National Guard, and the people they valiantly serve, are and will continue to be the embodiment of those words and the spirit that we all strive to personify. I thank them for their bravery, for their selflessness and for being great neighbors.

We will all stand by to be of assistance as everyone recovers from the natural disasters that have brought such destruction to the State I love.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island is recognized.

(The remarks of Mr. WHITEHOUSE pertaining to the introduction of S. 973 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the time for morning business for debate only be extended until 6 p.m. with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Alabama is recognized.

FINANCIAL HEALTH

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I want to share a few thoughts on a very important matter, the financial health of the United States. We had a nice meeting with the President earlier today. The Republican Senators virtually all were there, shared their thoughts, and the President responded. All in all it was a good exchange. Those are the kinds of meetings where I do not talk about what is said in detail and quote anyone.

I was asked by a number of reporters what happened and what did you say about it. I guess my conclusion is that not much happened. No commitments were made that I could see, that indicated the President had made any

change in the budget he had submitted or the speech he gave somewhat amending his budget a few weeks ago.

He did not make any changes in the plan I am seeing out there. He was open, discussed it, maybe something will happen. What is the status of the Senate's business? This is the Senate. The Senate has serious responsibilities. The Budget Act was designed to ensure that Congress passes a budget, because it was learned over the years—it goes back to the 1970s—that a budget is important for a country. Families have them, businesses have them. You need a budget.

Congress was having trouble passing a budget. So they passed the Budget Act that allowed a budget to become law without 60 votes in the Senate, but they could be passed with 50 votes. As we know, there are 54 Democrats in the Senate—and more, I guess, than that with Independents who caucus with the Democrats. So this is the situation we are in.

The President complied with the Budget Act, a week late, by submitting his budget, and his budget failed to meet the requirements of our time to a very significant degree. Every witness we have had in our budget committee—I am the ranking Republican on it—has indicated and told us, many in great detail and with passion, we are on an unsustainable course; you cannot continue to borrow 40 cents of every dollar and try to fund a government borrowing that kind of money.

We will hit a budget deficit this year of \$1.5 trillion, the largest in the history of America. In 4 years, the President will have doubled the entire debt of the United States based on the trillion-dollar deficits he has had each year. So this is not an acceptable path for us to be on.

We had hearings in the Budget Committee about the critical issues we face. We considered and had testimony from the fiscal commission that President Obama appointed—Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson, we had Rivlin-Pete Domenici. Senator Domenici, retired now, was Budget chairman at one point in time in the Senate. Alice Rivlin, OMB Director for President Clinton, is a wizard herself with numbers. They proposed some real changes in the debt trajectory we are on. I thought after that, and based on the comments of Senator CONRAD, our chairman, and the strong witnesses we heard who called on us to make significant changes in what we were doing that we would move forward with a budget that would be a good bit stronger than the one President Obama submitted.

Indeed, President Obama's budget was not serious. President Obama's budget took the current spending line for 10 years, that the Congressional Budget Office said we are on, and it made it worse. It made the deficit worse, \$2 trillion worse than the current plan we were on—totally unacceptable.

He proposed in his budget increasing the Department of Education funding

by 10.5 percent; increasing the Energy Department funding 9.5 percent; increasing State Department funding 10.5 percent; proposed increasing the Transportation Department 62 percent.

In a time when inflation is 2 percent, we are having those kinds of increases and we say we are submitting a budget that recognizes we are on an unsustainable course and we have got to change. Well, it was unacceptable. I was very disappointed about it. I think even the man he appointed to head the debt commission, Erskine Bowles, said they have come nowhere close to what is necessary to avoid our fiscal nightmare.

We were told by our Budget chairman, Senator CONRAD, whom it has been a pleasure to work with, that we would have a budget markup beginning this Monday. He told us that last week. Well, it did not happen on Monday. Then maybe it was going to be Tuesday. Maybe it was going to be Wednesday. Then all of a sudden the President invited the Democrats over Wednesday and the Republicans to the White House Thursday and everything is off.

I asked my staff, have we received a notice that we are going to have a Budget Committee hearing next week? The answer is no. So what do we say about that?

The Budget Act says the Senate and the House should commence budget action April 1. We have not done that. It says a budget should be passed by April 15. The Senate has not done that. The Republican House has. The Republican House has proposed a historic budget. They have passed it. They passed it on time. It will reduce spending by about \$6 trillion. That would actually reduce taxes also and get the rates down to help encourage more economic growth, and put us on a path to fiscal sanity, not only this decade, but in the decades to come, because it dealt with some of the exploding entitlement programs such as Medicare.

What resulted from that? Well, Mr. RYAN, a brilliant young Congressman who has worked on budget issues for many years, is the most knowledgeable person probably in America about the details and the financial condition of America. They attacked him as though he did something wrong. The Democratic Senators and the President are spending their time attacking the one person who stood up and produced a budget that can be defended. He is prepared to defend it anywhere, anytime. He goes to townhall meetings. He has stood before the press. He has issued statements. He has explained what his budget is. It may not be perfect, but it is a change. It would put us on a path to financial stability. And what has the Senate done? Complained about his budget. Well, it is time this Senate produces a budget.

Let me say this: Today, 743 days have passed since the Senate has passed a budget. Now, let me ask, if we took a poll of the American people, how many of the American people would say the

Senate shouldn't pass a budget? We have a whole act that requires one to be passed and brought up and voted on. What happened last year? The Budget Committee did produce a budget. It came to the floor, and the Democratic leader, Senator REID, just didn't have time to bring it up. Why? Well, you know, there is a vote-arama. We don't like vote-aramas. What is a vote-arama? Everybody gets to file an amendment, and Senators are supposed to vote. It has to be brought up and passed. It is passed by a simple majority. Why? Because we want to accelerate the debate and make sure a budget is passed because a nation that intends to be serious about its financial stability needs a budget, does it not? This began in the 1970s.

So we are now beginning to wonder, will the committee even pass a budget? Is Senator CONRAD not even going to have a committee markup and produce a budget? Is the Democratic Senate not even going to move one out of committee? At least it moved one out of committee last year. And if the committee does meet and does move a budget, is Senator REID prepared to stand up, like Congressman RYAN, lay his budget down before the American people, and defend it before the world? Oh, well, we need to have talks. We have talks going on. The Vice President is having a meeting. The President is inviting everybody over.

Why don't we move forward with our budget process, I ask? Why don't we? Well, why not? We read in one of our local newspapers that cover the Senate—I think it was The Hill—Senator CONRAD had a hard time with his Democratic colleagues. His budget, which I very much was afraid wouldn't contain spending enough, but certainly I felt it would be better than the budget President Obama had submitted, was discussed with his Democratic colleagues last week in their conference, and it didn't go well, we are told. So this week he came back again, apparently, and produced another budget.

According to the report, Senator SANDERS—probably the most aggressive and articulate advocate for greater government spending and activism in the Senate—seemed to be very happy that he changed the budget, and it had \$2 trillion in tax increases, they said, and \$2 trillion in spending reductions. That is supposed to be balanced. But that is not what the debt commission said. The debt commission—which I didn't agree with, really—said we should have at least \$3 worth of spending reduction for every \$1 in tax increases.

Then we have another report. I think it was in the CQ publication that does work around here and digs up information. They said it looks as if there are going to be fewer spending reductions. It looks as though it is going to be about \$2 trillion in tax increases and only \$1.5 trillion in reduced spending. So it is less than even 1-to-1.

Well, I think if I were the majority leader, I wouldn't really feel comfortable about bringing such a budget as that before the American people and standing right down here and defending such a weak response to the fiscal crisis we are now in. Of course, that budget is irresponsible if that is so. I don't think the American people will be happy with it. I certainly will oppose it with all the strength in my body if that is the nature of it.

Well, why don't you know, SESSIONS?

Well, I haven't been told. We asked. The Republican members of the committee wrote the chairman and asked that any budget numbers that are produced be produced 72 hours in advance of the hearing so we can study it, offer amendments, or substitute as we choose to do. We have been basically told we will get the budget resolution the chairman intends to file the morning it starts. When we commence the hearing to mark up the budget, we will be getting the copy of what they propose to bring forward. We really think that is not a healthy way to do business on a matter this important.

This period in history represents the most significant long-term threat to American financial stability that we have seen maybe ever. Sure, we had a tough time during World War II and the debt went up, but we could see, when the war was over, the strength of our workforce, and the economy grew. We came right out of that and got that situation under control quickly. But now we are in a situation in which our Nation is aging. The number of people working is down. The number of recipients of Medicare and Social Security is up. We have to figure out a way to honestly deal with that without in any way placing our seniors at risk and other people who benefit from government programs.

It is going to take some change. It is first going to take change in wasteful Washington spending. All our discretionary spending needs to be looked at, and we also are going to have to look at the long-term prospects for our financial future, as our creditors—those who are loaning us this money we are borrowing—are getting uneasy. They are not too comfortable with what we are doing.

I believe any President of any party who desires the mantle of a leader, desires to demonstrate a commitment to a firm footing for our financial future, should come forth with a plan as part of the budget process and lay it out so the American people can see it.

I am becoming very concerned, once again, even though 743 days have passed since a budget has cleared this Senate, that we may not get one this year. What an event. That, to me, is unthinkable. How irresponsible could we be to go another year under these circumstances? For example, the Congressional Budget Office has analyzed the President's proposal for the future, and that scoring of the President's budget concludes a couple of things.

Last year, the interest we paid on the money this Nation has borrowed was \$200 billion. In 10 years, under the President's plan, the Congressional Budget Office said the amount of interest that would be paid in 1 year is \$940 billion. That is bigger than the Defense Department. That is bigger than Medicare. It will be the largest single item in the entire budget. It is unthinkable. We get no benefit from that whatsoever except the money we borrowed to live off of.

We are passing huge debts off to our grandchildren. The expert economists and financiers who testified before the Budget Committee said: Don't think you can just assume the problem falls on your grandchildren. They said we could have a crisis much sooner than that.

Mr. Bowles and Mr. Simpson issued a statement to us when they testified that said we are facing the most predictable debt crisis in American history. We asked: Could we have an idea of when such a crisis could hit us? And Mr. Bowles, chosen by President Obama to head the commission, said 2 years, maybe a little earlier, maybe a little later. Alan Simpson said: I think it could be 1 year.

Well, we hope we don't have some new debt crisis. We hope the people who have been loaning us money don't get so nervous, as they have done in Greece, that our interest rate surge puts this economy in a dangerous condition and damages our country. I hope that is not happening within 2 years or 1 year. Wouldn't that be a disaster for us? How do we prevent it? We take action now that changes the debt trajectory of our country and sends a message to the whole world: We get it. We know we can't continue on this path, and we are changing. And the way our Congress and government is set up, the way that change occurs is through the adoption of a budget.

I remain very disappointed that while the House has produced a historic budget on time—by April 15—we have not even begun to mark up a budget in the Senate. That is irresponsible. And we need to know and the American people need to know that the majority leader, if a budget is passed out of committee—and certainly it should be—will move it to the floor and bring it up for vote and amendment and debate, and then it goes to the House and conference, they hammer out the differences, and we adopt a budget that can help put this country on a sound financial path and avoid the kind of crisis so many experts have warned us could occur.

I thank the Chair. I see my fabulous colleague, Senator HATCH, the ranking Republican member of the Finance Committee and my former chairman of the Judiciary Committee. I was honored to serve with him.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I thank my dear colleague for his kind remarks. I appreciate them.

COLOMBIA TRADE PROMOTION AGREEMENT

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, yesterday the Finance Committee held a hearing on the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, what we call the Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement. This agreement will provide significant new opportunities for U.S. manufacturers, agricultural producers, and service providers in the rapidly growing Colombian market.

Implementation of the Colombia agreement would also benefit U.S. national security. Colombia is emerging from decades of civil strife, and it is in our interests to see that Colombia continues to heal from its wounds of the past. This free trade agreement will help bring further stability to Colombia, a close friend and ally, while also opening and further building the market for U.S. exports to that country. In short, it is a good agreement for the United States.

So what is the holdup? Over 4 years have passed since the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement was signed. It is imperative that the administration submit an implementing bill for this agreement to Congress, and soon. The administration, however, still won't say when it will send an implementing bill to Capitol Hill.

During yesterday's hearing, I asked our Deputy U.S. Trade Representative two very simple questions regarding this issue. First, assuming that Colombia fulfills the steps outlined in the labor action plan developed by the Obama administration and the Colombian Government, will the administration submit the Colombia agreement to Congress for a vote? Second, is the administration preconditioning the President's formal submission of the Colombia trade agreement on matters not related to the action plan, such as congressional extension of trade adjustment assistance or permanent normal trade relations for Russia? To me, these questions are pretty clear and can be answered with a simple yes or no. But, unfortunately, we did not get a clear answer. After years of delay, we still do not know if the administration will ever submit the Colombia agreement to Congress for approval. This is very unfortunate.

The Obama administration's delay in submitting the Colombia agreement is hurting U.S. exporters. This failure is a drag on job creation and economic growth. While the President has dithered as to whether to implement the trade agreement with Colombia, our trade competitors have been more than willing to enter into agreements with Colombia. Consequently, while Colombia's tariffs on U.S. imports have remained in place, Colombia's tariffs on products from other countries are falling away.